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Global Encounters in Japanese Social Thought During the Meiji Era

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Abstract

Postwar approaches to Japan's modern era have functioned within a metanarrative of modernization. Contemporary comparative analysis approaches Japan from the vantage point of civilisational sociology and a paradigm of multiple modernities. The development of sociological thought itself in Japan could also be interpreted through this framework, although there has been little research to date along these lines. This paper explores how Japanese social thought coalesced in global encounters in the 1870s and 1880s. It analyses the radical reinterpretation of classical Western sociology in the reception of Comte, Mill and Spencer by Japan's scholars and modernisers in the nascent public spheres of Meiji society. Special attention is paid to the philosophy of Nishi Amane.

Keywords: Japan, Modernity, Sociology, Philosophy, Civilisation

The Japanese intelligentsia that emerged in the crucible of the Meiji transformation that began in the late 1860s seized upon Western sociology. The global search for knowledge that the new state inaugurated rapidly strengthened tenuous links with European intellectual networks. At the interstices of philosophy and sociology, Japan's new intellectuals found a civilisational reflexivity that differentiated them from the Meiji regime's program of modernisation. This article explores the conditions in which this mode of sociological thinking developed at this juncture. It approaches the context in which European sociology was encountered from the vantage point of civilisational sociology and a paradigm of multiple modernities. This is laid out through an overview of the deliberations of the *Meirokeisha* ('Meiji Six Society'), an urban debating society that constituted a proto-public sphere, and the work of Nishi Amane (1829-97) in particular. The principal argument is that the *Meirokeisha* did not only translate Western philosophical and sociological works, as has been previously thought, but laid out a more distinct foundation for Japanese sociology.

There is already a significant body of literature on Japan's reception of Western sociological and historiographic thinking. The familiar juxtaposition of tradition and modernisation demarcates many lines of inquiry made in this mode. However, the engagement of Western social thought can be regarded, from a different angle, as a process of civilisational reinterpretation. Recent developments in civilisations sociology provide a conceptual backdrop to the re-examination of Japanese sociology undertaken in this article. Revisions in the conception of civilisational formations have occurred in the work of two historical sociologists

with an interest in Japan.¹ This work is situated in a broader field in which there has been a theoretical reconception of civilisational forms.² Two conclusions about the civilisational stance of Japan in the nineteenth century can be drawn from this recasting. Firstly, Japan's trajectory is distinctive and not subject to a prevailing logic of convergence. Formulation of this perspective in a non-developmental framework decisively cuts the ties with the earlier suggestions of sociologists examining 'modernisation' that Japan's political, social and economic structures would converge with Western equivalents. Such suggestions now seem completely unsustainable in light of examination of Japan's longer-term historical experience. A shift from the metanarrative of modernisation to the problematic of modernity has given energy to a synthesis of fresh historical material and contemporary comparative insights. The problematic of modernity does not presuppose an evolutionary or developmental trajectory in the manner that modernisation studies have. Japan's individual path

¹ J P Arnason, *The Peripheral Center: Essays on Japanese History and Civilization* Melbourne: TransPacific Press, 2002 and *Social Theory and Japanese Experience: The Dual Civilization*, London: Kegan Paul International, 1997 and S N Eisenstadt, *Japanese Civilization: a Comparative View*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996. Elsewhere, I have argued that civilisational sociology as it is re-cast by Shmuel Eisenstadt and Johann Arnason offers Japanese Studies a historical and theoretical paradigm that could enrich it theoretically and position it better in a scholarly 'conversation' with other area studies. See J C A Smith, "Theories of State Formation and Civilisation in Johann P Arnason and Shmuel Eisenstadt's Comparative Sociologies of Japan", *Critical Horizons*, vol.3, no. 2, 2002.

² J P Arnason *Civilizations in Dispute: Historical Questions and Theoretical Traditions*, London: Sage, 2002, and E Tiryakian ed. *Rethinking Civilizational Analysis*, special issue of *International Sociology*, vol. 16, no.3, 2001.



can be more easily accommodated within this framework.

Secondly, syntheses of sociological models of civilisation now point to a plurality of civilisational bases, rather than reproducing the normative notion of a singular civilisation that has been ideologically central to historical empires. In contemporary comparative analysis, historical civilisational relationships are now seen as more open-ended. Japan's modernity is re-cast as a dynamic inter-cultural realignment, rather than the product of a clash of more-or-less closed cultural worlds. Indeed, the realignment can only be interpreted and understood meaningfully if Japan's historical context is accounted for. The long and original engagement with China furnished the Japanese with a paradigm of intellectual, religious, linguistic and artistic involvement with another civilisational force. As a result, the encounter with the West was not the novel and unprecedented experience that it is assumed to be in the sociology of modernisation. In this regard, the model of multiple modernities, a proposition that is increasingly accepted, is a greatly attractive one.³ The 'modern' itself can be appreciated on this basis as a political and cultural condition that emerges from inter-civilisational engagement between two open though differently contextualised cultural worlds. It then becomes possible to redefine 'modernisation' more properly in the Japanese case as historically-specific institutional and cultural strategies and not a presumed singular and inexorable social and economic logic that takes the Western path as paradigmatic.

The Meiji transformation of the 1870s has been subsequently re-theorised within civilisational sociology as a profound cultural realignment. Change was oriented simultaneously to external and internal contexts. Globally, and through the region, imperial states were shaping a new constellation of power, while within Japan the conflict of elites and of competing state-building strategies brought instability. In this environment, civilisational realignment was not purely a matter of technological import and innovation or the constitution of a political system. Rather it was an issue of a disposition towards the process of remodelling itself. Japan's elites believed that the apparatus of the new state was itself a transformative agent. But the program of transformation was ambiguous and invoked the symbols and properties of tradition along with an enthusiasm for modernity. Japan was realigned in a movement that was simultaneously a restoration of a mythical archaic culture and a conversion within the apparatus of the state to

modern instrumental and functional rationality.⁴ It was a movement that was ideologically steeped in a vision of cultural tradition, not of universalistic or revolutionary change,⁵ even though the transformation it launched was far-reaching. To negotiate the international environment, the Meiji state equipped itself with functional institutions of power, while internally merging aspects of tradition and modernity. Culturally, this was a pragmatic reorganisation of pre-existing resources and their mobilisation in a materialising international climate. The currents of social thought that weighed most heavily on the Meiji regime reflect this combination. It is commonly accepted that, alongside of the familiarity with Western intellectual currents that had begun to grow from the 1850s onwards, the prior Tokugawa era produced important schools of thought that also influenced the subsequent direction of Japan. That influence was diffused throughout intellectual networks that had already established connections with European centres of thinking. Although couched in the strategic language of modernising and learning from the West, the new orientation tended towards a more original approach.

Sociology in Europe

The interpretation of Japanese modernity sketched out above is distilled from civilisational approaches and acts as a backdrop to the explanation of the origins of sociological thinking that I outline below. Rather than regarding inter-civilisational engagement as the passive reception of Western thought, a more active and innovative process is posited. Japan's program of global discovery in the 1870s conditioned the development of socio-philosophical thought. An acute awareness of the inter-civilisational nexus can be discerned in the purposeful reinterpretation of Western sociology and philosophy. The major influences in this early period included Comte, Mill, Spencer and Rousseau. They did not count known proto-sociologists such as Adam Ferguson or Montesquieu. Marx was translated from the 1880s onwards, but his works were not widely read and were not well understood during the Meiji era. Ferdinand Tonnies was bypassed.

It is a commonplace that social-evolutionary theory dominated important currents in nineteenth century.⁶ It brought together otherwise divergent thinkers. Engels came to Morgan. Thomas Malthus lurked in the background for Darwin and Spencer. The early Durkheim read the latter's work. Comte left an impression on sociology through Durkheim, Spencer and even Marx and Engels. Directional progress from simplicity to complexity in biological

³ S N Eisenstadt *Comparative Civilizations and Multiple Modernities*, Leiden: Brill, 2003 and P Taylor *Modernities: A Geohistorical Interpretation*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999.

⁴ Arason, *Social Theory and Japanese Experience*, pp.425-9.

⁵ Eisenstadt, *Japanese Civilization*, pp.271-3.

⁶ T Patterson, *Inventing Western Civilization*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997, pp.45-52.

mutation and societal convergence was the motif of the social-evolutionary paradigm.

Comte and Spencer were two important evolutionary thinkers that loomed large for the Japanese. Their sociologies developed in different circumstances. Comte's emerged in the tumultuous wake of the French Revolution. His vision of moral order contrasted with France's traumatic upheaval.⁷ Prosperous, industrial, imperial Britain provided a calmer climate to work in for Spencer. Despite diverging circumstances and methodologies, Comte and Spencer could be read together against the backdrop of the self-confidence of the West. Comte's optimism flowed from conceptualised laws of scientific development. Human knowledge proceeded from simple to complex, with sociology at the apex of scientific achievement synthesising morality and science. In contrast, Spencer rejected the belief in the moral regulation of society by the state. He had nonetheless embraced the search for general laws and elaborated a five-stage schema of evolution, designating highly differentiated societies that exhibit industrial complexity as the most advanced. His sociology was easily plied within an orientation that set the West with its distinction of state and civil society at the summit of the social-evolutionary scale.⁸ Both perceptions of European modernity as the most complete differentiated form slot into a spectrum of European views widely-held in the nineteenth century about the order of human societies. They added to the arsenal of European thought that enthusiastically set the West at the head of the hierarchy of civilisations. The ranking of different social worlds was common also to nineteenth century sociologies that the Japanese came to grapple with.

Sociology in Japan

A survey of the literature finds a consensus that Comte and Spencer's sociologies found fertile ground in Meiji Japan. Deeper probing reveals that this occurred in two ways. Firstly, the organicism in their systems of thought resembled familiar Neo-Confucian traditions.⁹ Consequently, each could hold appeal for all views on the Japanese political spectrum. This explains how Spencer's sociology retained its popular appeal beyond the 1870s, while Rousseau's more alien social contract theory did not. Secondly, Spencerian and Comtean evolutionism was adaptable to debates about the Meiji program of modernisation. The world-historical sweep of their evolutionist claims appealed to the regime that was striving to realise a place in the global imperial

order. Active interpretation of both perspectives was rendered possible by the universalist elements internal to each. Evolutionism addressed a world in which the leading centers of power were empire building, large-scale industrial capitalist economies. The strategic goals set by the Meiji regime addressed that world too. Therefore, the parameters of evolutionary thinking were suited to the global circumstances that the Meiji elite believed were confronting Japan.

How European social thought was received is open to further social analysis. The notion of the public sphere, although normally applied in the Western context,¹⁰ has some useful application in my current argument. In the 1870s social thought was reinterpreted in two public spheres. One involved urban intellectual circles; the Meiji Six Society was foremost amongst these. The other emerged from the prolific press and the popular rights protests.¹¹ The slump of these two independent forms of public coincided with the institutional consolidation of an ascendant Social Darwinism in the middle-Meiji years. Traces of the impact of Comte and Spencer survived nonetheless, as their sociologies were never taken as indivisible unities. Spencer was read by some of the leaders of the 1870s Popular Rights Movement as a proponent of natural rights.¹² With the movement's demise, the emphasis fell more on the organicist reading of his philosophy and less on his critique of Bentham's utilitarianism.¹³ Comte's influence was sustained in formal lectures at Tokyo Imperial University in the late 1870s. Others continued this current.¹⁴ The priority placed on the legitimacy of imperial sovereignty, precluded the wholesale absorption of either sociological *oeuvre*. The resacralisation of Meiji as emperor curtailed prospects of popular sovereignty, which were considered by Comte and Spencer to be the requisites of civilised modernity. The autonomy of civil society, which had been a condition of sociology in Europe, was therefore extremely limited. In Japan's nascent public spheres, Western sociology could therefore not simply be transposed or mimicked.

⁷ A Swingewood, *A Short History of Sociological Thought*, New York: St Martin's Press, 1991, pp.32-42.

⁸ S Andreski, *Herbert Spencer: Structure Function and Evolution*, London: Thomas Nelson and Sons 1971, pp.11-37.

⁹ A Swale, *The Political Thought of Mori Arinori: A Study In Meiji Conservatism*, Surrey: Japan Library, 2000, pp. 181-2.

¹⁰ C Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992 and J Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Oxford: Polity Press, 1989.

¹¹ J L Huffman, *Creating a Public: People and Press in Meiji Japan*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997.

¹² R W Bowen, *Rebellion and Democracy in Meiji Japan: A Study of Commoners in the Popular Rights Movement*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980, pp.191-212.

¹³ S Yamashita "Herbert Spencer and Meiji Japan" In Hilary Conroy et al eds. *Japan in Transition: Thought and Action in the Meiji Era 1868-1912*, London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1984, pp.77-80.

¹⁴ K Shoji, "Institutionalization of Sociology in Japan" In Su Hoon Lee ed. *Sociology in East Asia and its Struggle for Creativity*, Proceedings of the ISA Regional Conference for Eastern Asia, Seoul, Korea, Nov 22-23, 1996, pp.33-4.

Sociology in the *Meiokusha*

There are diverging views on the respective weight of the popular and intellectual publics in this early period.¹⁵ I argue that some have underestimated the impact of the *Meiokusha* on urban Japan on the grounds that it did not attract the following of the proto-democratic movements and therefore was not, in a sense, representative of more widely-held sentiments and views. The case for the significance of the *Meiokusha* can be put on the following basis. It was a modest intellectual circle caught between competing images of modernisation that emanated from above and from below; that is, from the regime and from the democracy movements. It conducted itself, in part, as a public debating society discussing momentous issues of public importance. As public figures, they openly engaged the civilisational possibilities that issued from Japan's global engagements. Furthermore, those views were broadcast in order to realise moral and cultural goals that it set in its vision of modernity.¹⁶ In doing so, the Meiji Six Society captured and expressed the dilemmas of modern reconstruction and, to some degree, couched them in sociological terms.

A more explicit argument that it was the inter-civilisational interpretive role of the Meiji Six Society that was special—the main contention of this section—can now be made. The *Meiokusha* fashioned early Japanese sociology in the conditions of civilisational flux or, in other words, in the conditions in which the perception of civilisation itself was changing. Its scholars and public figures were self-assured sociologists, philosophers, linguists, political and legal theorists and educationalists all at once. Their translations, interpretations and deliberations on key works of Western sociology and philosophy made this public body a think-tank of sorts on Western ideas. They worked at the civilisational interstices, engaged in an interpretive role of 'description of a received world and construction of a new one'.¹⁷ The 'received world' of Western scholarship seemed perplexing. Western thinking presented as intrinsically self-critical of its own values and this critical disposition was part of the cognitive complex that the Japanese

intelligentsia was grappling with. In this regard, the Meiji Six did not simply receive Western ideas abstracted from their formative context in the manner implied in some of the literature. Instead, the civilisational condition of Japan was also a reference point for their interpretation of new sociological and philosophical ideas. Seen in this way, some of the past claims made in assessments of the *Meiokusha*'s relevance can be set to one side. Its size belied its influence inasmuch as it extensively tested the prevailing notion of civilisation. What the literature has failed to highlight is the especial location of the *Meiokusha*. While the popular *shimbun* (the press) acted as a public focus for conflicting visions of social reform, the *Meioku Zasshi* published by the Society may be best seen as a vehicle of debate about the course of Japanese civilisation.

Views debated by the *Meiokusha* directly addressed the climate of enthusiasm for 'civilisation and enlightenment' (*bunmei kaika*).¹⁸ 'Civilisation and enlightenment' followed the 1871 Iwakura Mission in which a large government party travelled abroad in an extensive examination of the industry, education and political systems and cultures of other countries. It was decreed by the state as the strategic direction of internal reform of Japanese society needed to secure independence in the international system of states. For the *Meiokusha*, it was an early topic of debate that required both elaboration and definition. Although each of the Society's members was quite distinct in outlook, striking similarities on this aim bound them together.¹⁹ This was an example of the group's self-assumed purpose to occupy an interim position between the government and the populace. Its members sought to cultivate what they perceived to be a civilised subjectivity as a response to the disorienting fluctuations of social life at this time. They associated the anomic decline of moral bearings with the collapse of the *Tokugawa* world. The end of the Samurai class, the accelerated commodification of economic life, the architectural metamorphosis of Tokyo and the early experiments in industrialisation produced a widespread sensation of unprecedented turmoil in urban Japan. This outlook informed debate for a self-defined interpretive group. Determining the content of 'civilisation and enlightenment' brought the *Meiokusha* to civilisational realignment, not solely to the West, but also to a shaky and indeterminate Japanese modernity.

Its membership was tied together by a project to invent a modern Japanese subjectivity; a 'spirit of

¹⁵ Bowen, *Rebellion and Democracy in Meiji Japan*, W R Braisted, *Meioku Zasshi: Journal of the Japanese Enlightenment*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1976, R H Havens, *Nishi Amane and Modern Japanese Thought*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976, D Huish, "Aims and Achievements of the Meiokusha: Fact and Fiction", *Monumenta Nipponica*, vol.32, no.4, 1977, pp.495-514 and D Huish, "The Meiokusha: Some Grounds for Reassessment" *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol.32, 1972, pp. 208-29.

¹⁶ J K Fisher, "The Meiokusha and the Building of a Strong Nation" In eds. H Wray and H Conroy *Japan Examined: Perspectives on Modern Japanese History*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1983.

¹⁷ D Howland, *Translating the West: Language and Political Reason in Nineteenth Century Japan*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 2002, p.5.

¹⁸ Y Motoyama, "Meiokusha Thinkers and Early Enlightenment Thought" In eds. J S A Elisonas, and R Rubinger *Proliferating Talent: Essays on Politics, Thought and Education in the Meiji Era*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press 1997, pp.245-7.

¹⁹ M Nakamura, "The Intellectual Class", *Journal of Social and Political Ideas In Japan*, vol.2, no.1, 1964, pp.18-19.

independence' in the reckoning of Yukichi Fukuzawa, one of their foremost thinkers. On this point, however, they had a perception and purpose that should be delineated from the more instrumentalist outlook of the Meiji oligarchs. In the eyes of *Meiokusha*, this was not going to be a process of endogenous change only. An immediate appreciation of the international order informed the Society's scrutiny. Their works took in the nature of international law, constitutionalism and state formation, civil law and political sovereignty, the matter of rights and representation and, above all, the character of the modern subject. Discussions of how Japanese subjectivity must be reconstructed worked with an image of modernity that went beyond the engineering and infrastructural feats of the Meiji regime. For the *Meiokusha*, 'civilisation and enlightenment' had a dual aspect as the imperatives of modern state formation and the dilemmas of cultural transformation merged. Both aspects—power and culture—were guided by an orientation to both national upheaval and to the international environment. Of course, this was also a challenge for the functionaries and politicians of the state. But within the regime, its resolution lay in the active and purposeful exercise of power. In contrast, the relationship between the revolution in ethos and the institution of power for the *Meiokusha* was not so straightforward. Indeed, it was marked by a far-reaching tension between the surface effects of the program of modernisation launched by the regime and the depth of reconstruction of subjectivity that it seemed to need.

In sum, the Meiji Six Society did not generate an institutional space for autonomous and critical sociological reflection, inasmuch as no lasting public domain emerged. But its members did contribute in important ways to the interpretation of particular currents of sociology and therefore to the longer-term development of Japanese sociology. In conveying Western ideas they were, in effect, translating the social philosophies that they had encountered.²⁰ Nakamura Keiu's (1832-91) direct translations of Smiles' *Self Help* and Mill's *On Liberty*, along with Amane's translation of *Utilitarianism*, presented foundational works to the Japanese. Mori Arinori had an ongoing relationship with Herbert Spencer and their correspondence was made available to others.²¹ Kato Hiroyuki (1836-1916), Tsuda Mamichi (1829-1903) and Amane constituted a register of evolutionary, organicist sociology that was variously influenced by Comte and Spencer. The scholars of the *Meiokusha* addressed a country that, though in a state of flux, was a well-suited object of an organicist sociology

that stressed the *gemeinschaft* character of social relations.

Amane's Civilisational Thought

Between 1862-6, Nishi Amane studied in Holland, where both he and Tsuda were introduced to Adam Smith, Bentham, Mill and Comte.²² Amane developed the salient ideas from Comte, Mill and even Kant into a more elaborate philosophical system.²³ He has been credited with the introduction—in true Comtean fashion—of the term and the idea of sociology.²⁴ The remainder of this article focuses on two inter-civilisational themes in Amane's interpretive work: 1) the translation and partial reconstruction of utilitarian moral philosophy and 2) knowledge and civilisation. These two themes can be discerned in the essays Amane published in *Meioku Zasshi*.

In the essays 'The Three Human Treasures' (*Jinsei Samposetsu*) Amane outlines a reconstructed utilitarian basis for a new moral order. He estimates Comte and Mill to be modern registers of European morality, but the latter is the over-riding influence in this area.²⁵ The pursuit of happiness is conditioned by the three requisites of wealth, health and knowledge. Universal observation of the three treasures amounts to the greatest public good. Although this was an all-embracing prescription, its accomplishments lay in voluntary adherence:

Individuals thus should all energetically and assiduously exert their best efforts night and day to seek these three treasures as there is nothing more important for the individual than these three treasures as the 'norms' of conduct and as the fundamentals of morality.²⁶

This addresses a normative frame. It is an endorsement of the institution of dimensions of civic equality. Equal access to opportunity and freedom of occupation and movement were important values for Amane.²⁷ There are tones of universalism in the way that he expounds his ethics in this series of essays. His constant Neo-Confucian references to 'Heaven' as the source of ethics, although variable in meaning, point to a universal and binding set of moral obligations.²⁸ Even so, one can detect the relativism that also underscores the normative focus. This blocks Amane from achieving his aim of moral

²⁰ A Cobbing, *The Japanese Discovery of Victorian Britain: Early Travel Encounters in the Far West*, Surrey: Japan Library, 1998, pp.160-5.

²¹ Swale, *The Political Thought of Mori Arinori*, pp.188-219.

²² W G Beasley, *Japan Encounters the Barbarian: Japanese Travellers in America and Europe* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995, pp.121-3.

²³ G K Piovesana, *Recent Japanese Philosophical Thought 1862-1962*, Tokyo: Monumenta Nipponica Monographs 1968, pp.5-18.

²⁴ N Kawamura, *Sociology and Society in Japan*, London: Kegan Paul International, 1994, pp. 4-5.

²⁵ K Masaaki, *Japanese Thought in the Meiji Era*, trans D Absoch, Tokyo: Pan Pacific Press, 1958, pp.110-3.

²⁶ Braisted, *Meioku Zasshi*, p.465.

²⁷ Havens, *Nishi Amane*, p.151.

²⁸ R H Minear, "Nishi Amane and the Reception of Western Law in Japan", *Monumenta Nipponica*, vol.28, no.2, 1973, pp.170-2.

governmental rule in the following way. In Amane's opinion, the three treasures are a normative foundation for individual and national life alike. They, in other words, should guide governmental legislation and action. Unlike Mill, however, Amane remained indifferent to the question of the particular form of state and believed that the new ethics could be reconciled with any type of government. This is not to suggest that he was unconcerned with the ethical character of governments, but only that the form of government was not a moral question. In this, he proved himself to be remarkably unaware of the significance of the context of English struggle for constitutional rule in which utilitarianism gelled.²⁹ Nor did he pay any heed to the character of Japan's form of imperial sovereignty; he never expressed the view that the Meiji era's imperial oligarchy was an infringement on the three treasures. His permanent neutrality on the moral implications of the form of state can be understood as an attempt to occupy an inter-civilisational space; on this question, he was neither British nor peculiarly Japanese.

The three treasures constitute the basis of social relations. Relations between individuals are mutual when the treasures are respected. Echoing Mill's a priori rule that society precedes the formation of the polity, Amane put forward an anthropological generalisation of the norms that underpin social life:

...fraternal social life is invariably mutually cultivated and an urgent necessity in the human world before government has yet been established...Yet when we consider its fundamental sources, social intercourse is rooted internally in the mental character of man (sic) and based externally on the character of human structure, that is, on natural reason. Since human beings evolved from monkeys and were born men, they have been inseparable from social life.³⁰

This is not a relativist topology of human civilisations. In modern nations respect for health, wealth and knowledge is a leveller because it forms the wellspring of 'social intercourse'. The condition of moral reciprocity is a feature of modernity that distinguishes the barbaric from the civilised, in Amane's eyes. For Japan to be modern, therefore, it is necessary to constitute the conditions of civic symmetry. In a manner consistent with the utilitarian notion of the confluence of private and public interests, Amane upholds the individual's private commitment to 'continually plan for his own profit',³¹ as the key to the public interest and a guarantee of social cohesion. But this did not square easily with Japan's communal cultures. In order to ward off accusations of cultivating self-

centeredness, Amane placed a stress on the positive application of the three treasures. He underlined the relations of obligation, which Japanese were accustomed to, so that utilitarian principles could be rendered intelligible. The image of modernity and civility remains consistently utilitarian nonetheless. These principles are the sine qua non of national betterment and individual improvement. Japan would be assured that enlightened civilisations could be distinguished from all others on this basis. However, as the above quote indicates, Amane believes it a tendency that is latent in all societies. This foreshadows later speculation on the evolutionary hierarchy in Spencerian *toyoshi* studies.

Comte's inspiration is direct in the second area of science and civilisation, as one historian points out.³² There is, nonetheless, an undeniable originality here. At this time, Amane coined many Japanese terms that still have currency today. Beyond forging the nomenclature of the sciences, he added his own interpretive touches. The branches of knowledge were married to the arts and the sciences.³³ Amane introduced an original division between the common, intellectual and natural sciences. Furthermore, it is philosophy and not sociology that sits at the apex of human knowledge. Out of this reading Amane condenses Comte's progressive schema and recomposes it as a fresh Japanese version. In the process of recomposition, recognisable cognitive categories taken from Comte were fused with other factors that acted as stimuli to the development of a Japanese rendition of positivism. The breadth of knowledge indicated that a wider intellectual horizon had opened up, an encyclopaedic imagination, if you will.

Amane's commitment to positivist philosophy as the foremost science betrays a belief in evolutionism.³⁴ He had few doubts that the West forged the Enlightenment through its systematisation of knowledge. Japan too could achieve this state, but only with this kind of arrangement of the sciences. This can be no matter for the individual alone. The accumulation of the sciences is the condensation of civilisation's achievements in scholarship and there must be widespread participation in order to reach the goal of an advanced nation exhibiting 'systematically organised knowledge'. At that point, the indices of knowledge themselves direct societal progress. Comtean images of meritocracy are prominent in this reflection of the positive civilisation. The nation that has the merit of cataloguing knowledge according to the classes of science will produce meritorious advancement. This view diverged from other *Meirokeisha* thinkers by emphasising the totality of Western culture embodied in the sciences, rather than the partial

²⁹ Havens, *Nishi Amane*, pp.157-9.

³⁰ Braisted, *Meiroke Zasshi*, pp.486-7.

³¹ *Ibid*, p.514.

³² Masaaki, *Japanese Thought in the Meiji Era*, pp.101-7.

³³ Havens, *Nishi Amane*, pp.100-5.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p.107-10.

approach to national spirit (Fukuzawa), constitutional arrangements (Kato) or the adoption of foreign customs (Tsuda).³⁵

Other relevant aspects of Amane's life and work cannot be discussed here in the interests of brevity. In the sum of his life, he was unable to render Western philosophy in its entirety. He was ill disposed to existing neo-Confucian cosmology in the 1870s, just as he was disinclined to accept radically indigenous categories that emerged in the later Meiji years. Instead, he developed a mode of sociological thinking that addressed an inter-civilisational context.

Conclusion

Early Meiji Japan confronted known and ostensibly stable national versions of Western modernity. In turn, the Japanese sense of modernity was demonstrable and yet still indeterminate. The short-lived enthusiasm for Western things—clothes, music and manners—did not enter considerations of Western sociology without reflection. Early modern thought was framed in terms that were simultaneously Western and Japanese. The *Meiokusha*'s efforts—and Amane's among them—in articulating and reinterpreting this inter-civilisational position and then debating out reforms expanded Japan's embryonic sociological horizon. They established a social evolutionary philosophical foundation for later developments in sociology. However, even at this stage, sociological thinking was developing a specifically Japanese flavour. Subsequently, it was institutionalised in the imperial universities and in competing sociology associations that were able to variously engage contemporaneous Western sociological work. The partly independent and speculative engagements of the Meiji Six Society were supplemented by the academicisation of sociology in an environment in which imperial hegemony over scholarship was steadily growing.

³⁵ Motoyama, "Meiokusha Thinkers and Early Enlightenment Thought", pp.269-70.

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